



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
LYRASIS members and Sloan Foundation

<http://www.archive.org/details/chileanmunicipal00halp>

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Center for International Studies

International Communism Project

C/63-16
May 9, 1963

THE CHILEAN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
of
April 7, 1963

Ernst Halperin

F
3099

H33

The Chilean Municipal Elections of April 7, 1963

1. Introduction

At 11 o'clock on the evening of Sunday, April 7, a torchlight procession of some 200-300 people was marching down Alameda, the main boulevard of Chile's capital. There were students among them and young professional people, shop-girls, office-workers in threadbare dark suits, and also quite a number of young men who obviously could not afford any kind of Sunday clothes at all. It might have been a Communist victory parade, had not one of the marchers called out: "Viva la Democracia Cristiana" from time to time, to the accompaniment of good-natured cheers and happy smiles.

Further up on Alameda, the windows of the Radical Party campaign headquarters were dark, but lights were still on across the road at Democracia Cristiana headquarters. A small crowd was gathered in front of the ramshackle three-story building, and more people had assembled in the court-yard to listen to the loudspeaker announcing a steady stream of Demo-Cristiano successes from one end of the country to the other.

By this time the loudspeaker at the Communist headquarters ten blocks away on Teatinos Street had ceased transmitting election figures. In the doorway some two dozen students were huddled round a portable radio set. The young people were sullen and subdued; it was evident that they had expected spectacular Popular Front gains and considered their absence a serious defeat.

Nearby, in the old city square, workmen were already taking down the banners and election posters suspended from a network of wires between the trees. A platoon of police stood looking on with their carbines at

ease. The police had been called out in force in Santiago and all over the country that day, but the precaution seemed unnecessary. The mood of the people was relaxed as they patiently stood in long queues in front of the election precincts. No foreigner watching the men and women of Chile quietly fulfilling their civic duty could fail to be impressed. One might have been doubtful before, but on this day one realized the truth of what one's Chilean friends had always emphatically stressed: that democracy is as firmly entrenched in Chile as anywhere in the Western world. As a matter of fact, Chile is unique in Latin America in having a democratic tradition older than that of most European countries. With only brief interludes of civic strife, and one five-year lapse into dictatorship,¹ Chile has now enjoyed democratic government for almost a century and a half.

1. The Ibanez dictatorship from 1927-1931. See i.a.: Ernesto Wuerth Rojas, Ibanez, Caudillo Enigmatico (Santiago de Chile: Coleccion Vidas, Editorial Pacifico, 1958) and Luis Correa Prieto, El Presidente Ibanez (Santiago: Editorial Orbe, 1962).

2. The Protagonists.

Seven parties contested the municipal elections of 1963:

To the right, there were the Conservatives and the Liberals, the two traditional parties which had alternately ruled Chile for the first century of its existence as an independent state. Their names are most appropriate, since in their social composition they strikingly resemble the Tories and Whigs of nineteenth-century England. Roughly speaking, the Conservatives may be described as the party of the landed aristocracy, while the Liberals represent the interests of industry (in the 19th century this was mostly mining), finance and commerce. But the decisive difference between the two parties is an ideological and not a social and economic one: the Conservatives are traditionally the party of the Catholic church, while the Liberals, even though not militantly anti-clerical, have always stood for the separation of Church and State. Both parties were able in the past--and to some extent manage even now--to rally considerable popular support to their banner, not only in the rural areas, where those who vote at all usually follow the local landowner's lead, but also among the city middle and lower-middle class.

The Radical Party originated in the Eighteen-sixties when the most violently anti-clerical wing seceded from the Liberals. This party is also most appropriately named, being an almost exact replica of the French Third-Republic Radicals. There are wealthy landowners among the Radicals, lawyers, schoolteachers, civil servants, many white-collar workers, and probably the bulk of the independent lower-middle class of shopkeepers and craftsmen. In the late nineteenth century the Radicals

had already become so strong that it was difficult to form a government without them. But the combined strength of the two traditional parties kept the Radicals out of the Presidency until 1938, when they were at last able to move into the Presidential Palace - but only by the fairly desperate expedient of tying up in a Popular Front coalition with the Communists. From then on, they retained the Presidency until 1952, when General Ibanez, one of the less interesting and less attractive of Latin American caudillos, swept to power on a wave of popular discontent. The Radicals soon recuperated, and even though their candidate was heavily defeated in the 1958 presidential election, they again became the decisive force on the Chilean political battleground and the mainstay of Liberal President Alessandri's coalition government. Together with their former antagonists, the Conservatives and Liberals, the Radicals today compose the government coalition of Frente Democratico.²

The Christian Democrats came into being in 1957 by the fusion of two small Catholic groups, the Falange Nacional and the Christian Socialists. Although both these groups had had a measure of working-class support and some limited influence in the trade-union movement, neither of them had made any appreciable impact on the Chilean political scene. But after their fusion, left-of-center Catholicism suddenly emerged as a major political force. Democracia Cristiana appears to have grown mainly at the expense of the two traditional rightist parties by syphoning off much of their urban middle-class and lower middle-class support. The new Catholic party is said to be particularly strong among the "new mid-

2. For the history of the Conservative, Liberal and Radical parties in the 19th century, see Encina-Castedo, Resumen de la Historia de Chile (Editorial Zig-Zag, 1954), vols. II & III.

dle-class" or technological intelligentsia, and it has been remarkably successful in combatting Communist influence in the universities.

Democracia Cristiana is committed to a program of sweeping reforms which it calls "revolution with freedom." It proclaims the necessity of a total remodeling of Chile's antiquated social and economic structure, but inertia in this country is so great, and the people appear to be so good-humored--not to say lackadaisical--that it is difficult to see how this could be achieved. So it is still too early to judge whether Chilean Democracia Cristiana is a passing fashion or whether it will turn out to be what Robert J. Alexander regards as the best bulwark against Communism in Latin America, one of those "indigenous movements of social reform which can carry out the changes long overdue in the region, and direct the process of economic development and industrialization which will make possible the improvement in the standards of living in the people of the area."³

To the left of Democracia Cristiana, there is the coalition which calls itself by the ambitious name of "People's Action Front" (Frente de Accion Popular, FRAP).

The mainstay of this coalition are the Communists. Communism in Chile has a longer history than in most Latin American countries. It may be said to date back to 1912, when a brilliant and devoted labor agitator, Luis Emilio Recabarren, founded the Socialist Workers' Party, which he linked with ^{the} Comintern in 1921. Under Recabarren the Communist Party was a small powerless group, and in 1924 its founder committed suicide in a fit of despair at the workers' lack of response to his appeals. During the

³ Robert J. Alexander, Prophets of the Revolution (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 3.

next few years, the Communists made some headway under the leadership of Manuel Hidalgo, and even acquired a sizeable parliamentary representation. But after the Ibanez dictatorship turned against them in 1927, they were gradually reduced to insignificance by internal strife and by the suicidal policies imposed upon them by the ultra-left leadership of the Comintern. It was not until the middle 'thirties that they were put on their feet again thanks to the able leadership of the Peruvian Comintern agent Eudocio Ravines, who taught them the strategy and tactics of the Popular Front. From 1947 onwards, they again suffered severe repression at the hands of the Gonzalez Videla government (1946-52), but towards the end of Gonzalez' presidential term the repressive measures against them were gradually relaxed. Under Gonzalez' successor Ibanez they recovered lost ground, regained their hold on the trade union movement and cemented their alliance with the socialists. Thanks to Communist backing, the socialist candidate for the presidency in the elections of 1958, Salvador Allende, came within 30,000 votes of victory.

The Chilean Communists are definitely a party of the urban working class. They can also muster a sizeable contingent of students, although they are at present losing ground in the universities to Democracia Cristiana. They have a comfortable majority in the Writers' Union, probably owing to the towering influence on Chilean letters of one man, the poet Pablo Neruda, who is certainly one of the half-dozen outstanding figures of contemporary world literature.

Numerically, the Chilean Socialists are almost as strong as the Communists. Although not nearly as well-organized, they seem able to

compete with and hold their own against their more radical allies in many working-class districts. Their influence on intellectual circles, particularly among university and high school teachers, is probably even stronger than that of the communists.

The Socialist Party was founded in the early Nineteen thirties by that amiable and romantic figure Colonel Marmaduke Grove. In the first years of its existence it was far stronger, more respected, and more influential than the Communists, but poor leadership and constant internal squabbles sapped its strength. More than once the Socialist Party disintegrated into several warring groups, and the amazing thing is not that it has lost strength but that it has been able to reunite and become as strong as it is now.⁴

The Socialist Party's present alliance with the Communists dates from 1956. One would have expected the Communists to utilize these years to infiltrate and completely subjugate their weaker ally. Yet this is not the case. It is rumored that a number of Communists who sought refuge in the Socialist ranks during the Gonzalez Videla repressions were ordered to stay there by the CP leadership when the anti-communist Law for the Defence of Democracy was finally repealed in 1958. Yet there does not seem to be any systematic Communist factional activity inside the Socialist Party, as there certainly is in Pietro Nenni's Socialist Party in Italy. As a matter of fact, the Chilean Socialists, in spite of their official alliance, are organizationally far more independent of the Communists than the Italian Nenni-party.

What little organization there is in the Chilean Socialist Party is controlled

4. For the history of the Chilean Communist and Socialist parties, see Robert J. Alexander, Communism in Latin America (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, second printing, 1960), the chapter on "Communism in the Shoe-string Republic." Also: Elias Lafertte, Vida de un Comunista (Santiago, 1961).

by Secretary General Raul Ampuero, who does not hide the fact that he is highly critical of the Soviet Union, and who a year ago was tactless enough to ask the Communists why they objected to United States aid for Chile if it was alright for Poland and Yugoslavia to accept such aid. Even party leader and presidential candidate Salvador Allende, who engineered the alliance with the Communists, cannot himself be considered a Communist either by his record or his inclinations. The Socialist party newspaper Ultima Hora is not above needling the Communists by printing advertisements for Peking Review, and one of its editorials recently even reproved the CP leadership for its "narrow, timid dogmatism"⁵ in advising the Party membership to steer away from Chinese propaganda. As for the bulk of the Socialist Party members, they appear to consider FRAP a mere expedient to secure the election of their candidate Allende in the 1964 presidential race.

Nor can the Communists be said to control the third member party of FRAP, the Partido Demócrata Nacional (Padena). This is a motley collection of former supporters of the late president Ibanez, local caciques or "Honoratioren," to use Max Weber's term. These are people who have no ideology and who certainly do not consider FRAP to be anything but an election alliance which may bring them within reach of the power they lost when Ibanez left the presidential palace in 1958.

There are two more groups in FRAP. One of them, Vanguardia Nacional del Pueblo, is merely a local political machine set up to ensure the re-election of one senator, the leftwing independent Baltazar Castro. The other, the Partido Radical Doctrinario, got 2249 votes (0.1% of the total) in the last election in which it participated.

FRAP thus is not the sinister Communist-dominated engine one would expect from one's experience of Communist strategy and tactics in other parts of the

5. Las Noticias de Ultima Hora, Santiago, April 30, 1963.

world. The reason why the Communists have not converted their allies into help-less satellites is that they are simply not in a position to do so. Their organization may be the best of any party in Chile and indeed in all of Latin America, but this does not mean that it measures up to communist standards of efficiency in other parts of the world. It may be adequate for such tasks as filling a theatre for a political meeting, supplying its own members with the party newspaper and collecting party fees, but it simply does not have the cadres able and willing to undertake the long-range, systematic, painstaking effort needed in order to infiltrate and take over an alien organization.

Such cadres are probably not to be found in Latin America, because the denizen of this vast continent is not in the habit of sacrificing himself to an abstract organization. This is what the well-known anthropologist John Gillin deplores as a lack of "impresonal confidence." Gillin writes:

Many a Latin American feels very strongly that he cannot trust anyone unless he knows him well and understands his inner dignity and worth...A corporation, a political party, a technical program cannot be trusted if one does not know and understand the individuals involved who are significant from one's own point of view...Modern complex systems require the development of impersonal confidence. The democracies of the West, with their combinations of large free-enterprise corporations and welfare-state programs, could not operate if the average citizen did not have confidence in large organizations and their representatives whom he may not know intimately...⁶

Not only the Western corporation and welfare-state society, but also and even more so communism requires what Gillin terms "impersonal trust" and some might call "gullibility." Gillin considers the lack of "impersonal trust" in Latin America a "cultural maladjustment." Any communist party organizer would fervently agree with him. For it is exactly this lack which makes communist

6. John P. Gillin, "Possible cultural maladjustment in Latin America," Journal of Inter-American Studies, April 1963.

party machines in Latin America so much less efficient and less effective than in most other parts of the world.

3. The Pre-election Situation

Presidential election campaigns in Chile are surely the longest in the world. The next election is scheduled for October 1964, yet the socialists nominated their candidate, Salvador Allende, and announced the official opening of his campaign, as early as December 1962. The other candidates are about to be nominated at this time of writing (May 1963).

Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that the municipal elections of April 1963, a year and a half before the presidential election, would be considered a sort of full-dress rehearsal by the parties and fought on national much more than local issues. So Salvador Allende toured the country, was introduced everywhere as "the next President of Chile," and appealed to the voters to elect more FRAP councillors as a precondition for the great popular victory of 1964. The other parties' approach was similar. Only Democracia Cristiana studiously avoided mentioning 1964 and campaigned on the slogan: "Government begins in the municipality." And even their reticence was somewhat hypocritical: the day after their election triumph they were all too ready and eager to point to its significance for 1964.

For the three government parties, the Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals, the municipal election was above all a vote to decide whether the three of them together still enjoyed the country's confidence.

In 1958, President Alessandri's lead had been narrow indeed:⁷

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Votes</u>
Alessandri (Conservatives and Liberals):	390,000
Allende (FRAP):	356,000
Frei (Democracia Cristiana)	256,000
Bossay (Radicals)	192,000
Independent	41,000

This meant that the victor had less than one-third of the electorate behind him. But then the Radicals joined the government coalition, giving it a comfortable parliamentary majority and, in the parliamentary elections of 1961, a popular majority of 53.44%.

Would the government coalition, or Democratic Front, retain its majority of the popular vote? The outlook was none too good. Criticism of the government by both FRAP and Democracia Cristiana had been incessant, harsh, and effective. There was a real mood of dissatisfaction in the country. At the time of the election the public school teachers were on strike. Some weeks before there had been a wave of price increases and a government decree freezing the price level had only resulted in such essentials as sugar and rice temporarily disappearing from the market.

The foreigner was particularly impressed by the fact that every Chilean he met emphatically stated that the country was in the grip of a real economic crisis. This however does not mean quite as much as in other countries: the Chileans have never ceased repeating this same statement ever since the bottom dropped out of the nitrate market in the 1920's.

7. Latin Americans are not very good at figures. For these and the following figures I have had to rely on Diario Ilustrado, Santiago, April 1 and 10, and El Mercurio, April 10. These figures do not tally with each other or with those of other publications. I have been obliged to pick from them the most likely ones.

Actually, it cannot really be maintained that the Chilean economy is in a slump. Last year GNP was up 4%, and Chilean economists assess the unemployment figure at not more than 6% of the labor force. Yet there is one very tangible indication of the government's failure. The President had come to power on a pledge to stabilize the currency. He had managed to do so for two years; but since then, the escudo has dropped to one-third of its former value. The country has once again entered a period of real, galloping inflation.

Two days before the election the President spoke to the country. It was not the speech of a confident man. A reasoned defense of his policy was interspersed with words of bitter complaint against his critics. These were obviously directed at Democracia Cristiana, since the wildly demagogic attacks of the exyreme left merited only contempt. In the final sentence of his unusual speech, the President called upon the Deity to "protect our country and to give me the strength to continue serving it in the midst of so much ingratitude and injustice."⁸

A further question which the election was expected to answer was to what extent, if any, existing discontent would benefit the left-wing opposition, i.e., FRAP. In the 1958 election, the FRAP candidate had polled somewhat less than one-third of the total vote, and this had almost sufficed for victory, because the votes of the other two-thirds of the electorate were split among three serious candidates. This will probably not happen again in 1964, but if FRAP only managed to raise its share of the vote to slightly over one-third, it might yet win in 1964 against two evenly matched opponents.

8. El Mercurio, April 5, 1963.

As for Democracia Cristiana, it was generally expected to improve its position, but for it to become what the Chileans call "the country's foremost political force," i.e., the strongest party, its gains would have to be very substantial indeed. In the parliamentary elections of 1961 it had only occupied third place, a close runner-up to the Liberals, but lagging far behind the victorious Radical party. In that election, the parties had occupied the following positions:

<u>Parties</u>	<u>Votes</u>
1. Radicals:	297,000
2. Liberals:	221,000
3. Christian Democrats:	213,000
4. Conservatives:	197,000
5. Communists:	158,000
6. Socialists:	149,000
7. <u>Padena</u> :	95,000

4. Election Results

Mainly owing to new regulations making participation well-nigh compulsory for literate adults (illiterates do not have the vote in Chile), the size of the total vote on April 7, 1963 was roughly one-third larger than in 1961. This meant that each party had to increase the size of its vote by about 50% in order to maintain its former percentage of the total vote. The official result as finally announced on April 10 was as follows:

<u>Parties</u>	<u>Votes</u>
1. Christian Democrats:	452,000
2. Radicals:	427,000
3. Liberals:	260,000
4. Communists:	254,000
5. Socialists:	230,000
6. Conservatives:	228,000
7. <u>Padena</u> :	104,000

The Christian Democrats' gains had surpassed their most sanguine expectations. They had more than doubled their vote and left the Radicals behind by 25,000, and this in spite of the fact that the Radical Party had shown remarkable stability, increasing its vote by more than 100,000 and only slightly losing in percentage.

A comparison of 1961 and 1963 percentages gives the following picture:

	<u>1961</u>	<u>1963</u>
Radicals:	22.17	20.8
Liberals:	16.54	12.7
Christian Democrats:	15.96	22.0
Conservatives:	14.73	11.0
Communists:	11.78	12.4
Socialists:	10.67	11.1
<u>Padena:</u>	7.12	4.9

This shows that the Christian Democrats had managed to increase their slice of the vote considerably, while two of the FRAP parties, the Communists and Socialists, registered a slight increase. The losers on the government side were the Conservatives and Liberals (very heavy) and the Radicals (slight). On the left, Padena alone lost more than its two larger allies gained.

The government coalition had lost its absolute majority. But the surprising aspect of this election was that the leftist opposition (FRAP) had not profited by the government's loss of popularity. In spite of slight Communist and Socialist gains, FRAP as a whole had a slightly lower percentage of the vote, a clear indication that it was not the Chilean people's idea of an active and constructive opposition. Instead, discontent was reflected by the increased vote of a moderate, Christian and democratic party:

Due to an error in pagination, article continues on p. 17.

	<u>1961</u>	<u>1963</u>
Democratic Front; (Conservatives, Liberals, Radicals)	53.44	44.5
FRAP: (Communists, Socialists, <u>Padena</u>)	29.57	28.4
Democracia Cristiana:	15.96	22.0

A breakdown of election figures and percentages by municipalities is not yet available. The election figures by provinces suggest that FRAP, in spite of some efforts, has not been able to pick up votes in the rural districts. The main strength of the Communist Party is still concentrated in the urban and industrial areas, i.e., the province of Santiago, which comprises 40 per cent of the total national vote, the northern nitrate and copper districts (the provinces of Tarapaca, Antofagasta, Atacama, and Cocombo), the port of Valparaiso, and the southern coal-mining and industrial province of Concepcion. The Socialists are recruited mainly from the same area, though they are considerably weaker in the north, plus the southern provinces of Valdivia and Magallanes. The latter province, a sheep-raising and meat-processing region, is dominated by them to such an extent that they control most of the municipalities.

5. 1964 Presidential Prospects

Democracia Cristiana prospects for the presidential election of 1964 have been greatly enhanced by the results of the municipal elections. It is most unlikely that the Radical Party would support a Democracia Cristiana candidate, since its anti-clerical tradition is still very strong. On the other hand, there are prospects of Liberal and Conservative defections to the right, and of Padena to the

left, in favor of the Democracia Cristiana candidature.

The FRAP candidate Salvador Allende's prospects have greatly deteriorated, since FRAP has revealed itself a sterile movement unable to rally the discontented to its banner.

On the other hand, the conservative government coalition still has a good chance to retain the presidency, especially if the economic situation should show a marked turn for the better in the course of 1963-64.

3218 762



University of
Connecticut
Libraries



3 9153 01864118 5

